

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT AU PRINCE 1628

E.O. 11652: GDS
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SUBJ: CELEBRATION OF THE SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY OF JEAN CLAUDE
DUVALIER'S ACCESSION TO THE PRESIDENCY

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. CONTRARY TO SOME EXPECTATIONS, THE CELEBRATIONS OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF JEAN CLAUDE DUVALIER'S ASSUMPTION OF THE HAITIAN PRESIDENCY WERE STRICTLY TRADITIONAL. NO NEW PROGRAMS OR REFORMS WERE ANNOUNCED. THE IMAGE PROJECTED WAS ONE OF "BUSINESS AS USUAL" ALTHOUGH THERE WAS SOME EVIDENCE THAT THE REGIME WAS NOT ABLE TO MOBILIZE A CHORUS OF MASS SUPPORT AS EASILY AS IN THE PAST. SOME OBSERVERS SEE IN THE EVENTS OF THE PAST WEEKEND SIGNS THAT THE REGIME'S "OLD GUARD" PREVENTED PRESIDENT DUVALIER FROM MOVING FORWARD WITH NEW INITIATIVES IN HIS "JEAN CLAUDIST" PROGRAM OF NATIONAL UNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. WE THINK IT MORE LIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT THIS CELEBRATION OF CONTINUITY WAS NOT CONSIDERED AN APPROPRIATE FORUM FOR NEW DEPARTURES. ALTHOUGH THE TRADITIONALISTS IN THE PRESIDENT'S GOVERNMENT REMAIN STRONG, WE EXPECT THE CAUTIOUS STEPS TOWARD REFORM TO CONTINUE AS THEY DID AFTER A SIMILAR STAND-PAT PERFORMANCE LAST YEAR. END SUMMARY.

2. THE SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF FRANCOIS DUVALIER
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AND THE ACCESSION OF JEAN CLAUDE DUVALIER TO THE HAITIAN PRESIDENCY ON APRIL 21/22 WAS BILLED AS A MANIFESTATION OF THE PEOPLE'S SUPPORT OF "JEAN CLAUDISM," THE PRESIDENT'S PROGRAM OF NATIONAL UNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THE FORM OF THE CELEBRATION WAS STRICTLY TRADITIONAL, A REQUIEM MASS FOR THE FATHER ON FRIDAY AND A TE DEUM FOR THE SON ON SATURDAY. THE SATURDAY MASS WAS FOLLOWED BY THE FORMAL

OPENING OF THE SIXTH AND FINAL SESSION OF HAITI'S 41ST LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (A NEW ONE WILL BE ELECTED EARLY NEXT YEAR).

3. DESPITE SOME SPECULATION THAT THE OCCASION WOULD BE USED AS THE FORUM FOR THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF SOME DRAMATIC NEW INITIATIVE, THE CONTENT OF THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH TO THE ASSEMBLY WAS ALSO TRADITIONAL. THE HOUR-LONG LITANY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CURRENT PROGRAMS IN THE VARIOUS SECTORS OF HAITIAN SOCIETY DURING THE PAST YEAR VARIED LITTLE IN SUBSTANCE FROM THE "STATE OF THE NATION" ADDRESS ON JANUARY 2. THERE WERE THE USUAL NATIONALISTIC OVERTONES AND THE PRESIDENT QUOTED JEFFERSON TO THE EFFECT THAT EACH NATION HAS THE RIGHT TO GOVERN ITSELF ACCORDING TO THE FORMS THAT BEST SUIT IT AND TO CHANGE THOSE FORMS OF ITS OWN WILL. DUVALIER REAFFIRMED HIS DOCTRINE OF NATIONAL UNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND LIBERTY HE ASSERTED THAT THE ELOQUENCE OF ACTS IS PREFERABLE TO DRAMATIC PROCLAMATIONS.

4. THIS YEAR, AS IN THE PAST, HUNDREDS OF TRUCKS AND BUSES WERE COMMANDEERED TO BRING PEASANTS IN FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE. THEY WERE GATHERED IN FRONT OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY BUILDING AND THE NATIONAL PALACE WHERE SIGNS BEARING " JEAN CLUDIST" SLOGANS WERE DISTRIBUTED. MANY OF THE PEASANTS SEEMED SULLEN AND UNHAPPY AS THE FESTIVITIES WERE ORGANIZED AND THE SIGHT OF THOUSANDS OF ILLITERATES WAVING CAREFULLY LETTERED

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SLOGANS CONTRIBUTED TO THE AIR OF ARTIFICIALITY. PARTICIPATION BY PORT AU PRINCE RESIDENTS WAS NOT AS LARGE AS IN PAST YEARS AND SCHOOL CHILDREN WERE RECRUITED TO FILL UP SEATS IN THE CATHEDRAL FOR THE MASSES. POPULAR ENTHUSIASM PICKED UP, HOWEVER, WHEN THE FORMAL CEREMONIES WERE SUPERSEDED BY THE CARNIVAL-LIKE ATMOSPHERE OF THE SPECIALLY HIRED MERINGUE BANDS.

5. MILITARY SECURITY WAS SLIGHTLY MORE RELAXED THIS YEAR THAN A YEAR AGO BUT BOTH THE REGULAR MILITARY AND THE MILITIA (VSN) WERE OMNIPRESENT AT THE CATHEDRAL AND AT THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

6. ON THE AFTERNOON OF APRIL 22 THE PRESIDENT MADE A BRIEF SPEECH IN CREOLE TO THE CROWD GATHERED IN FRONT OF THE NATIONAL PALACE. HE REITERATED THE NEED FOR THE PRESIDENCY FOR LIFE AND, PROMISING A BETTER LIFE FOR ALL HAITIANS, ASKED SUPPORT FOR "JEAN CLAUDISM."

7. COMMENT: DESPITE SPECULATION THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD TAKE SOME DRAMATIC INITIATIVE TO REINFORCE HIS STATED COMMITMENT TO GRADUAL "LIBERALIZATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION" OF THE

HAITIAN SOCIETY, NOTHING REALLY HAPPENED. THIS LED SOME OF THOSE WHO EXPECTED CHANGE TO SPECULATE THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS PREVENTED FROM MOVING FORWARD WITH THE REFORMS HE HAS REPEATEDLY PROMISED. REINFORCING THE VIEW THE OLD GUARD IS "CALLING THE SHOTS" IS THE REPORT, AS YET UNCONFIRMED BY OTHER SOURCES, OF A RESPONSIBLE AND EXPERIENCED HAITIAN JOURNALIST THAT THE TWO VSN MEMBERS, CONVICTED LAST MONTH OF ASSAULTING PASTOR/EDITOR LUC NEREE, FLANKED THE PRESIDENT AT ONE POINT DURING SATURDAY'S CEREMONIES.

8. THE MORE LIKELY EXPLANATION FOR THE "BUSINESS AS USUAL" CEREMONIES IS THAT THE SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DUVALIERIST SUCCESSION WAS NOT CONSIDERED AN APPROPRIATE TIME TO BREAK WITH PAST TRADITIONS NOR THE CHALLENGE THE GUARDIANS OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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DUVALIERIST ORTHODOXY. IN THIS RESPECT THE SPEECH MIMICRED THE SITUATION A YEAR AGO WHEN, AFTER SPEAKING BOLDLY OF THE NEED TO REFORM THE "ANTIQUATED AND FALTERING STRUCTURES OF GOVERNMENT" ON APRIL 6, THE PRESIDENT EMPHASIZED CONTINUITY IN HIS SPEECHES ON APRIL 22. A LITTLE OVER A MONTH LATER HE SHUFFLED HIS CABINET, PROCEEDED TO MAKE A NUMBER OF ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS, AND LATER TO LAUNCH "JEAN CLAUDISM." SO FAR THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE HARD-LINERS HAVE PREVAILED TO RULE OUT FURTHER CHANGE. CERTAINLY THE TRADITIONALIST FORCES REMAIN STRONG--AND MUST BE REASSURED ON EACH NEW INITIATIVE, BUT WE EXPECT THE PRESIDENT AND OTHERS TO CONTINUE THE RECENT PATTERN OF CAUTIOUS STEPS TOWARD REFORM.

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